



MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY OF SERVICE

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** ★★ ★

Help Kids Make Healthy Food Choices with ChooseMyPlate

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that approximately 17 percent of American children could be classified as obese in 2008. Obesity represents a well-known risk factor for type 2 diabetes, and this epidemic in childhood obesity has led to a surge in type 2 diabetes diagnoses in teens and even younger children. You can help children live healthier lives by creating a service project to teach children and their families about healthy food choices. Below are five key steps to teaching kids and their families about healthy eating and creating a healthy future.

1. Identify a Location

Meet kids where they are in your community by connecting with schools, after school programs, community centers, and faith-based youth programs and tell them that you want to offer healthy eating classes for kids. Contact your [State Agency for Child Nutrition Programs](#), to find sites that already serve as Summer Food Service Program hosts. Ask them if they might want to partner with you for an MLK Day project to help kids make healthy food choices. One or more of these locations may be the ideal place to host your event. Select a location that is easily accessible via public transportation or within walking distance of the places where people live, learn, worship or play such as public housing, schools, houses of worship, or community recreation centers.

2. Organize a Team to Plan

Create a team to plan and promote your nutrition event at your host site as well as throughout the community. A successful group effort requires a motivated team that agrees upon clearly defined tasks, sets reachable goals and acts with inspiration and purpose. Your promotion should target both volunteers who want to run classes as well as community members who want to bring children to the event. Identify volunteers who already have knowledge about nutrition and those who are used to working with kids. Use these volunteers to train others to run classes or serve as assistants. Once you have your volunteer planning team in place, review resources that can assist you in developing a child-friendly curriculum and/or planning menus for the service project.

- Use [ChooseMyPlate.gov](#), a site focused on teaching nutrition to kids. My Plate replaced the food pyramid as an easy to use way to help kids understand what makes up a balanced diet.
 - There are activities for [children over age five](#) including a [whole grain lesson](#) and a [whole grain word scramble](#) to test knowledge gained from the lesson. Download a tip sheet of [kid-friendly fruits and veggies](#) and fun ways to prepare these items.
- USDA's [Team Nutrition Resource Library](#) includes an entire MyPlate curriculum including [teacher's guides](#) for grades 1-6; [songs](#) that teach nutrition; [posters](#) in two sizes; [parent handouts](#) in English and

Spanish; and even nutrition [games](#). This site also includes [nutritional information](#) for more than 100 different foods so that parents can see what their children are really eating.

- Visit the [Let's Move](#) website and select the [Eat Healthy](#) or [Kids'](#) sections.
- Utilize the resources above and responses to the following questions to develop your curriculum and a specific outline for the day including any optional activities:
 - How many children can your venue accommodate?
 - What ages do you want to target?
 - Do you want to keep all of the children together or break them into smaller groups based on age, if your venue will accommodate this?
 - What will parents or caretakers do while their kids are being taught about healthy food choices? Have you thought of ways to incorporate them?

Determine what kinds of supplies you will need to host your event and who you can partner with to obtain them. To start, you will need:

- a curriculum with related kid-friendly materials
- menu and related food items (if you intend to include a food preparation demonstration as part of the class)
- tips sheets for kids to take home as a reminder of what they've learned
- nutritional information, recipes, and tips for parents

While many of the above items may be downloaded from the resource web sites listed above, you may need to make multiple copies and, if doing a food preparation demonstration, you will need to secure the food items also. This will allow you to engage community organizations in providing financial or in-kind donations for printing/photocopying materials and providing healthy food items for your project.

- Contact local office supply stores or printing centers about photocopying/printing.
- Reach out to local restaurants and grocery stores as well as to friends and neighbors to gather food items. Consider hosting a targeted food drive for kid-friendly food prior to MLK Day to be used at your event.
- Use the USDA [gleaning toolkit](#) to utilize resources in your community that might otherwise go to waste.
- Remember to incorporate a way to thank your donors, maybe even by adding their logos with a thank you message to the bottom of all materials that you produce yourself such as the agenda for the day or menus.
- After in-kind donations are reviewed, purchase any remaining supplies before the service day so they're ready to go on MLK Day. Make sure that perishable supplies are appropriately stored.
- Consider setting up a registration process to ensure that you know when you have reached capacity for the venue.
- Also consider having multiple sessions with staggered start times to accommodate more participants.
- Set goals for yourselves, such as number of kids participating in lessons, number of meals served, number of donated items, or number of nutritional pamphlets distributed. Also consider goals that might be based on an evaluation or feedback such as number of kids and parents reporting increased knowledge about nutrition or number of kids and parents who said they would use the information they

received at home.

- Record these goals, and make sure you can meet them. If needed, revise the goals in a way that will make the whole team feel good about what you accomplish.
- [Post your project](#) on our site so that people in your area can join your efforts as volunteers or participants.
- Make a site visit in advance of MLK Day to determine how the room(s) will be set up, how you may accommodate an overflow of participants, or adjust the room if fewer participants show up than expected.
- Will anyone require accommodations to participate? Will you need a sign language interpreter?
- Conduct a run-through of your lesson; try testing the lesson with a few kids from the age group you have targeted to assess its effectiveness. Then adjust the lesson as necessary.

3. Implement the Service Project/Activities

On the event day:

- Make sure project leaders or coordinators are at the site early, ready to greet team members as they arrive. Bring team members in early to set up the room(s).
- MyPlate lesson and activities:
 - Remember to make this fun for the kids by using instruction, games, songs, coloring and repetition. Make things age-appropriate for your participants.
 - As instruction takes place, have trained volunteers circulate the room to make sure kids and parents are engaged and having fun.
- Food Preparation activities:
 - If you are doing a food demonstration, have volunteers do food preparation such as cleaning, sorting, measuring, or laying out nutritional information prior to participants' arrival.
 - You may want to start by talking about buying the ingredients used in preparing the healthy, kid-friendly meal on a budget.
 - At the end of the lesson, incorporate a community meal that brings together volunteers and participants to eat the food that they just made.
- Consider incorporating other related activities:
 - Have kids do a service project such as decorate place mats or make cards for residents of a local senior center.
 - Purchase a large canvas tarp and markers, lay it on the floor and have groups of kids draw what they learned about healthy food. Give the tarp to the venue as a thank you gift for using the space and an ongoing reminder about eating healthy food for their constituents.
 - Share information with parents about programs that provide food assistance throughout the year or other nutritional projects in which groups can participate, including:
 - [Summer Food Service Programs](#)
 - [Community Gardens](#)
 - [Child Nutrition Programs](#)

- [Farmer's Markets](#)
- [Food Banks and Pantries](#)
- [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#)
- Send home kid-friendly recipes and nutritional information, as well as information about Dr. King to help your participants eat well and reflect on Dr. King's teachings long after MLK Day.
- If you do any food preparation, make sure volunteers are assigned to clean-up duty as the lesson progresses to keep the environment sanitary and safe for the youth participants.
- Make time for reflection with participants and volunteers. Find out what the kids already know about Dr. King and about helping others. Maybe have kids draw a picture to connect Dr. King helping people, you helping kids learn about good foods, and the kids helping seniors by decorating place mats or making cards.
- Ask parents and kids, who are comfortable doing so, to share their reflections verbally. Talk about the parallels and differences between your efforts today and the mission of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to encourage everyone to live up to the purpose and potential of America. Provide discussion questions suitable for kids or simply ask them to talk about Dr. King's work and its relationship to what you are doing today.
- Use Scholastic's [Spirit of Service curriculum](#) for engaging youth conversation around Dr. King's actions and how they inspire service projects. (Grades [3-5](#) and [6-8](#))

4. Reflect and Assess

After the project is completed, take some time to assess and reflect on it with your partners. Think about what went well and what could be improved.

- Host an official debriefing meeting for team members after the service day.
- Examine the goals you set for yourselves and consider which you met, exceeded, and didn't quite reach.
- Who did your work impact? What did you accomplish? What were your impressions of the day?
- Ask everyone for their honest assessment of what went well and how to improve for next time.
- Consider what doing this work on MLK Day, in particular, meant to your community.
- Make a list and plan for any ongoing follow-up.

5. Share Your Story

We know you don't like to brag but...please do! You may inspire others to organize a healthy eating and cooking class once they hear what you accomplished. [Share your service story](#). We're listening and want to know what you did.